

Junior Aviators are Clear to Launch

Jessica Ridgeon

Australian Defence Force

The 2024 Air and Space Power Conference delivered the inaugural Clear to Launch Junior Aviator Symposium (CTLJAS). This symposium was introduced by WOFF Graham Docking as a way of instilling “understanding and confidence in our Junior Aviators to enhance capability”, in the hope of fostering innovation across the Joint Force. Over a hundred junior members registered for the event, which was held at the National Convention Centre in Canberra.

The first speaker was the 2024 Aviator of the Year, CPL Kbora Ali, who is an incredibly humble and inspirational Aviator. CPL Ali is the first Afghan refugee to join the Australian Defence Force (ADF); she began her journey in the Royal Australian Army where she served for 6 years prior to transferring to the Royal Australian Air Force. Throughout her career, CPL Ali has actively sought to develop herself, seeking opportunities both within and outside of her trade and the ADF. Her core message was to embrace every opportunity, seek to develop yourself as a well-rounded aviator through education, experience, and exposure, and the biggest limitation on your potential is what you believe is possible.

The next presentation was on writing effectively using consequential reasoning, which provided a framework which is applicable to many types of writing. The framework to enable effective writing for defence was labelled the ‘four Cs’ which were: Compelling, Credible, Clear and Concise. The application of the ‘four Cs’ will empower Aviators to convey their innovative ideas in the most effective way.

The symposium then heard from Martin James, an Air Force Historian who conveyed the importance of history and the unit history reports. His presentation reminded the audience that today’s Defence Force inherits its legacy from those who have gone before us and that there is an obligation to the past, present and future to continue capturing events through this information sharing as the present is the future’s history.

The symposium then hosted a Shark Tank-style panel, aptly named Pitchfest, which provided a platform for three junior aviators to deliver an innovative idea. The ideas pitched were reviewed in a discussion panel consisting of Warrant Officers from nations around the globe.

LAC Henry Lam launched Pitchfest with his vision of every military member communicating with confidence and presence through the implementation of formal spoken communication training into our existing Professional Military Education. LAC Lam shared his personal story of learning English as a second language at the age of six, explaining that he “felt like an alien”. His inability to communicate with people in his social and educational sphere at the time, led to his diligence in language education, specifically spoken communication. This diligence led him to develop a passion for the topic which was conveyed when he expressed

how important it is and how everyone can benefit from upskilling in spoken communication skills. The pitch was reviewed highly by Warrant Officers from multiple nations.

LAC Lochlan Crossley from 3SQN pitched an idea about a USB 'valve' which is designed to be used as a physical node between your device's connection/charging cord and the station to be connected to. This device will protect and alert the user to any malicious attacks that are attempting to connect to or install malware on the device.

Utilising a small, simple circuit board and 3D printed case with a simple code enables the device to be mass produced at minimal cost (approximately \$10) which is a "simple solution to a very impactful problem".

AC Louis LaMont pitched Additive Manufacturing which involves adding materials layer by layer via a 3D printer. He compared this with subtractive manufacturing which is when a slab of material is cut, subtracting the piece from a larger source. Additive manufacturing is a positive movement for sustainability, resource management and efficiency. The versatility of additive manufacturing is applicable to agile operations, having the flexibility to create tools or parts on demand in a heavily reduced time-frame.

After Pitchfest, Dr. Murray Simons presented on the topic of mobilisation. He is a fellow at UNSW who specialises in cognitive psychology. Dr. Simons served in both the New Zealand and Australian armed forces and currently holds the rank of SQNLDR in the Air Force. Dr. Simons opened with "Why defending the nation is not complicated". Dr Simons delivered an energetic, dynamic and interactive presentation capturing and at times shocking the audience and generating thought.

The presentation's main message was an educational one of embracing uncertainty to reduce fragility; a new take on building resilience anchored in cognitive psychology. Dr. Simons is an advocate for people realising their potential by unlearning linear thought processes in favour of a complex adaptive mindset, saying "you can't stop the waves coming in but you can learn to surf them".

The common theme through all of the presentations within the Clear to Launch Junior Aviator Symposium was one of having a "yes" mentality. Saying yes and seeking opportunities will enable members to reach their personal and professional potential. CAF joined the symposium, commenting that communication and leadership skills learned through opportunities like the CTLJAS are imperative to discussions about culture and addressing complex cultural problems. The symposium was wrapped up with a round of 'speed-dating', allowing the symposium participants to learn more about different initiatives within Defence. This was a unique way for the attendees to learn more in areas they find interesting and are passionate about.

It was great to participate in the inaugural Clear to Launch Junior Aviator Symposium and I was so excited when I learned about the intention behind the symposium and the potential outcomes. The capacity for innovation by enlisted members of our Air Force is something I am personally very passionate about. Initiatives like this symposium are uniquely positioned to enable innovation in support of a better Joint Force.

If you are curious and would like to learn more about the Clear to Launch program, please reach out to the Air and Space Power Centre at airpower@defence.gov.au.